

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman

Statement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas Initiative

President George W. Bush met this morning with leaders and representatives from eleven countries in the Western Hemisphere with which we have negotiated free trade agreements to launch the Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas initiative. Pathways will deepen existing partnerships and cooperation to ensure that the benefits of free trade and open investment are broadly shared throughout our societies. The leaders recognized the progress that has been made in the hemisphere to reduce poverty, open economies, and strengthen democracies.

The leaders also recognized the importance of multilateral, regional, and bilateral trade liberalization initiatives, and called on the U.S. Congress to approve the Colombia and Panama free trade agreements. Trade has been a positive story for the U.S. economy, accounting for more than 45 percent of our economic growth last year. U.S. exports are 18 percent higher in the first half of 2008 than the same period in 2007. We believe that we should build on this success to create more opportunities for all of our citizens.

We look forward to continuing to work together with these and other like-minded countries to achieve and sustain broad-based economic growth and development for all of our citizens, including holding a ministerial level meeting before the end of the year to move Pathways forward.